

June 13, 2008

Dear Friends:

During my visits to schools and communities across the state after I took office, a couple of messages came through loud and clear. First, we were spending too much time, energy, and money testing students. Second, the tests we administered didn't provide teachers and parents with enough detailed information on how individual students were doing and didn't give them results fast enough.

Our challenge was to fix those two problems while maintaining South Carolina's well-deserved national reputation for setting high academic expectations. The thought was if we can do that successfully, then our schools can strike a better balance between accountability testing and testing that leads to better teaching and learning.

That goal has begun to be realized. Last week, **H.4662** became law.

This new legislation will replace the PACT in 2009 while making significant changes to our state's overall student assessment and school accountability systems. Its passage marks the first significant changes to South Carolina's **Education Accountability Act** (EAA) since it was approved by the General Assembly ten years ago. The EAA mandated annual testing for 380,000 students in grades 3–8 and the publishing of annual school report cards.

The new law is what many had hoped for, but I don't want anyone to feel misled. We still have the same tough academic standards in place, and we are still committed to measure them for accountability.

The Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test is gone, but that doesn't mean that end-of-the-year accountability testing is going away. Such tests are mandated by both EAA and **No Child Left Behind**. What has ended is a particular type of test that educators and parents found lacking. There will be accountability tests next May and every May thereafter, and students and educators will continue to feel the pressure to perform well.

On the plus side, the tests that will replace PACT will give more detailed information about what students are learning, with quicker returns of scores to schools and parents.

PACT'S demise didn't happen overnight, and it took lots of hard work. So many people deserve our thanks—educators, public education supporters, parents, and BOTH the Republicans and the Democrats in our **General Assembly**.

I hope that we can maintain that spirit of cooperation as we tackle the issues of adequate and equitable school funding, the expansion of public school choice, and 4 year-old kindergarten next year. Doing so will benefit ALL of our students and ALL of South Carolina in the long run.

Sincerely,
Jim Rex
State Superintendent of Education

<http://www.ed.sc.gov/news/more.cfm?articleID=998>

<http://www.scstatehouse.net/CODE/t59c018.htm>

<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml?src=pb>

<http://www.scstatehouse.net/index.html>